

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 331**

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MONTANA INDEPENDENT TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS**

**JANUARY 25, 2007**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Michael Strand, and I am the CEO & General Counsel for Montana Independent Telecommunications Systems. My organization represents rural telephone cooperatives and their subsidiaries operating across Montana. I am also the Chairman of the Board for the Montana Council of Cooperatives.

I rise today in support of House Bill 331 specifically because I support the continued funding of the Montana Cooperative Development Center and the additional \$13,000 in funding called for in this bill.

The cooperatives I represent on a day-to-day basis are mature businesses that have existed for more than a half century. They actually rank fairly high among Montana businesses in terms of revenues and job creation.

However, the telephone cooperatives started out some fifty years ago in much the same way we are seeing many of the new cooperatives being formed today. Small groups of citizens are gathering together to find unfilled markets and fill them with goods and services needed both here in Montana and across the country.

As you have already heard from its Chief Executive, MCDC has had quite a number of success stories already. As most economic developers will tell you, it is much easier to foster growth in companies that already exist in Montana than to draw entire companies to Montana from elsewhere. Just as the telephone cooperatives have grown into businesses of great substance and sophistication, providing hundreds of good jobs, so too can we anticipate growth among the cooperatives MCDC is fostering today.

We therefore urge you to continue the State's funding support for MCDC so that it can in turn continue to leverage far greater funding from the federal government. Thank you for your time this afternoon, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**For Further Information, Please Contact:**

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